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Naval Deployments Are the Key Element to
Conventional Regional Stability

by

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CAPT

USN

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT

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The scope of the paper is limited to analyzing general background information, then focusing on a specific theater- CINCEUR's Southern region- addressing potential threats and key assumptions to make the force selection analysis more objective. The alternative force selections are then compared utilizing commitment and resolve, escalation control, power projection capability, organic sustainment and availability (in terms of reaction time).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Now, more than ever, the unified commanders must ensure the most effective and efficient utilization of the forces assigned to them. In this regard, I have proposed the thesis that naval deployments (primarily carrier battle groups (CVBG's) and amphibious task forces (ATF's)) are the key element to conventional regional stability.

This is not a new concept. In 1960, Liddell Hart stated that,

It was through sea power and its "companion"- the power to carry by sea a force that can be thrown ashore wherever desired or needed- that for centuries Britain helped her friends on the Continent to resist aggression, and averted its domination by any single tyrant.¹

This concept continues in practice today, and was stated by Admiral Trost in 1990,

The objectives of the peacetime posture of the U. S. Navy and Marine Corps are to achieve deterrence, meet alliance and treaty commitments, support national diplomatic objectives, and to be ready for the rapid response essential to deal with any crisis.²

As events around the world have unfolded in the last two years, dramatic and significant changes have occurred. Many now believe that the Soviet threat has passed. I do not intend to debate the credibility of the current Soviet conventional capabilities although they continue to exist through effective modernization programs. Their intent could be debated (and is

really unknown), but regardless, they cannot be overlooked as a potential adversary. Moving from a bipolar to a multipolar world has not eliminated problems. As we have seen in the Persian Gulf region, there remains ample opportunity for regional instability without Soviet involvement.

The "peace dividend" has enabled congress to justify significant military force reductions. Whether this is a wise move or not is irrelevant- it is a fact of life. It is important to note that these force reductions have had no impact on our national military objectives- nor should they. It is the responsibility of the military to help achieve these objectives of:

- detering military attack against the United States, U.S. allies, and other U.S. interests; and to defeat such attack should deterrence fail.

- encouraging the establishment and strengthening of freedom and democracy around the globe.

- encouraging and assisting U.S. allies and friends in defending themselves against invasion, armed insurgencies, terrorism, or coercion.

- protecting free commerce and ensuring U.S. access to world markets, natural resources, the oceans, and space.

- stemming the flow of illegal drugs into the United States.³

President Bush outlined a future defense policy to accomplish these objectives in an address at Aspen, Colorado, on 2 August 1990 which included the following four major elements: 1) Deterrence, 2) Forward Presence, 3) Crisis Response, and 4) Force Reconstitution. All of these elements are key factors in maintaining regional stability. Additionally, with the decline

of Soviet international influence, we find ourselves as the only true superpower remaining. As such, President Bush has stated that, "The pivotal responsibility for ensuring the stability of the international balance remains ours...."⁴

What impact does all of this have on the unified commanders? The theater CINC's have the responsibility of enforcing the military strategy of the United States. Whatever the budget cuts and force reductions result in, the military must ensure that it can still support our national and military strategies, both now and in the future. The theater CINC's bear a heavy burden in this, because it is they who will have to implement our policies with whatever forces are available after restructuring. To say that they have a vested interest in the forces available, and the most effective utilization of them is an understatement.

In order to analyze the thesis that naval deployments are the key element to conventional regional stability, I will discuss some pertinent general global issues, then focus on the Mediterranean area of operations (CINCEUR) and review the threat and historical case studies, utilize some assumptions, look at Army and Air Force perspectives and analyze and compare the alternatives.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

Despite the euphoria over the apparent eclipse of the Soviet threat, the world has not rid itself of regional instability. It is easy to find recent and significant threats or potential threats in any theater: Panama, Nicaragua, Chile, Grenada, Haiti, Angola, South Africa, Liberia, Libya, Lebanon, Israel, the Persian Gulf area, India, Pakistan, North and South Korea, and Cambodia just to name a few. In fact,

A great many more incidents involving demonstrative uses of military power have taken place than is typically realized: some 215 occurred between 1945 and 1976. If the study (by the Brookings Institute) had been extended to 1980, one would probably have found that the total had risen to about 250.¹

In an article by the current Naval leadership of the United States, the threat was well stated,

Clearly, international turmoil, aggression, and conflict are not things of the past. Drives for regional hegemony, resurgent nationalism, ethnic and religious rivalries, drug trafficking, and terrorism are certain to challenge international order during the final decade of this century. Within developing nations, dramatic increases in population and growing dissatisfaction with the perpetual gap between rich and poor will continue to be major causes of unrest and insurgency.²

While regional incidents continue to occur, it is alarming that many of the third world nations which could become involved in regional conflict are more capable than ever before. They are armed with state-of-the-art weapons systems and have been trained

by ourselves, our allies or the Soviets. "The widespread proliferation of advanced weapons- plus a demonstrated willingness to use them- will present new challenges to U. S. interests and military forces."³ There are no indications that this world situation will improve in the foreseeable future.

Bearing this threat in mind, and with the guidance provided by the President, the unified commanders must seek to achieve regional stability through deterrence, and if deterrence fails, the ability to swiftly defeat an opponent. Here, we are faced with the heart of the problem. Is stability more effectively accomplished through forward presence, or the proven capability and intent of the U. S. to utilize CONUS-based crisis response forces? According to Admiral Larson, "...a military vacuum invites aggression."⁴ And according to Admiral Trost, "Continuous presence is the optimum way to deter conflict and respond to crisis...."⁵ But despite these statements, we must review and analyze the possible alternatives. First, a look at our forward presence capabilities.

There are basically two types of forward presence forces- land-based and naval, both of which have advantages and disadvantages. Land-based forces possess timeliness and an unquestioned degree of commitment. In addition, land-based forces can bring tremendous amounts of combined arms combat power to bear in a short period of time. By being established in a location, they can develop a strong rapport and achieve exceptional readiness levels through intensive training with our

allies. They also become intimately familiar with the local geography and potential threats, and they have a well established logistics chain. Perhaps more importantly, they do not have to fight their way ashore.

One of the most significant problems with forward deployed land-based forces is the growing number of overseas base closures. One reason for this is the current trend of fiscal constraints, however, a second reason (and one over which we have little or no control) is that, "...increasingly even our closest allies are showing reluctance to have U. S. military units based on their soil...."⁶

In the last several decades we have seen the number of countries that host U. S. forces shrink by two-thirds, and the number of installations reduced by 60 percent. The heavy domestic political criticism levied on Prime Minister Thatcher's government for allowing U. S. Air Force F-111's based in England to participate in the retaliatory strike on Libya and France's refusal to allow those same aircraft overflight rights are graphic examples of why we must maintain a capability for unilateral action unfettered by foreign constraints when our national interests are at stake.⁷

According to Admiral Trost, "...more (overseas base) reductions are on the horizon in both Europe and the Pacific."⁸ This situation appears to have a significant impact on U. S. capability to deter regional instability around the globe.

Naval forces possess several advantages inherent to the environment in which they operate. Mobility, flexibility, readiness and sustainability are the "buzzwords" for the U. S. Navy and have been its foundation since its inception. An important factor in favor of naval forces is that, "They can move

into position rapidly and in strength without violating any borders or raising national sensitivities over territorial sovereignty. Once the crisis is resolved, naval forces can be withdrawn unilaterally without giving the appearance of retreat."⁹ This political aspect appears to be taking on greater significance in the new world order. Naval forces, because of their flexibility, are better able to control escalation than land forces, and finally, they possess a calculated ambiguity of intent which enhances their capability to utilize the element of surprise.¹⁰

The down side to naval forces is that they do not present the same level of commitment as land-based forces because of their inherent mobility. Deployed naval forces also require a level of logistics sustainment to perform their mission- although to a much lesser degree than land-based forces. But perhaps most importantly, naval forces cannot bring the massive amounts of power to bear that forward deployed land forces can.

For several reasons, the U. S. has developed a formidable CONUS- based crisis response capability. The forces which comprise this cover the range from special operations forces through the deployment of tactical fighter wings and armored divisions- with just about anything in between. Crisis response forces can be tailored to deal with a range of threats from a hostage rescue scenario to the recent Persian Gulf war. As with the forward deployed forces, the crisis response forces possess certain advantages and disadvantages. The first advantage is the

capability to rapidly deploy forces (albeit light) or to conduct air strikes (non-sustainable) almost immediately to anywhere in the world. "...the Air Force offers, in most cases, the quickest, longest range, leading edge force available...."¹¹ "Typically, land-based fighter forces require forward basing to sustain power projection options. But when the interests of our allies are threatened, basing will normally be made available- and our fighter forces can deploy within hours."¹² As we saw in Desert Shield, army airborne forces can deploy rapidly to project power, as well. Secondly, these forces can conduct extensive training at superb training sites in CONUS prior to deploying. Finally, the cost of maintaining forward bases and deployed shipping, and the associated logistics requirements are eliminated.

On the negative side, although the crisis response forces demonstrate commitment and resolve once deployed, there is a lesser degree displayed up to that point than from forward deployed forces. Knowing that U. S. forces are capable of arriving in a few hours is not the same as seeing a battalion of tanks in the countryside or a carrier offshore. Secondly, these forces do not initially possess a sustainment capability- that must be developed with a logistics chain. Also, the deployment of these forces may incur overflight problems enroute to their intended objective. Depending on the size of the deployment- there may be overtasking of Military Airlift Command (MAC) assets to support the desired lift requirements- with prioritization

conflicts resulting. And finally, once this wheel is set in motion, it is not easy to stop.

CHAPTER III

THEATER FOCUS

Now that some background for conventional regional stability has been established, I would like to focus on the European theater- in particular, the Mediterranean. As some theater specific issues are reviewed, I will make some assumptions in order to facilitate the analysis later in the paper. As the unified commander, CINCEUR is responsible to protect U. S. interests in the region in accordance with the previously stated policy and objectives. As we know, the Mediterranean (CINCEUR's Southern Region) has been a volatile area for centuries, and continues to possess the potential for future unrest and instability in varying degrees. The age old dissention between the Greeks and Turks continues today, and despite the evolving freedom in the Warsaw Pact, there could certainly be problems in Albania, Yugoslavia or Rumania. Libya could revert back to her old methods at any time, and there could be a rekindling of dissent between Syria and Lebanon. The Arab-Israeli problems could easily and rapidly escalate into a major conflict, or there could be repercussions throughout the region resulting from the Persian Gulf war or the Kurdish refugee problem. Finally, there could always be a terrorist problem resulting from a multitude of sources. CINCEUR must be prepared to contend with this broad range of threats, and must be able to respond rapidly on short notice.

Normally, his combat forces available in the Southern Region consist of a tactical fighter wing, a carrier battle group, an amphibious ready group, and Army and Air Force forces in the Central Region. In addition to these, he has the capability to request some of the crisis response forces mentioned previously.

There are airfields and port facilities throughout the Southern Region which are available and routinely utilized by U. S. forces. However, it is important to note that access to these bases could be restricted or even denied depending on the situation. In the past there have been restrictions placed on types of aircraft allowed in Sigonella, Sicily, and the utilization of airbases in Greece and Cyprus. This could certainly occur in the future, depending on the political sensitivity of a particular situation. But let us assume that the bases currently utilized by the U. S. would still be available. There is less of a problem with port facilities- especially since the dependence on them by naval forces is much less critical than airfield availability is for the Air Force.

Normally, support forces (airlift and sealift) are not restricted like combat forces are. This provides naval forces with a significant advantage in the Southern Region because naval forces can operate at sea in the Mediterranean for long periods with unencumbered logistics support. However, let us also assume that all U. S. forces will have effective logistics and lift support. (This presupposes air and maritime superiority- a reasonable assumption while opposing a third world threat- even

when mine warfare is considered).

Let us make three additional assumptions. The first of these is that adequate forces exist and are available, or are currently assigned to CINCEUR for utilization in any contingency (this may or may not be the case in the future). Secondly, we will assume that all forces are equipped with the latest systems and weapons available to them and are trained at equivalent readiness levels (in order to make our analysis more objective). Finally, let us assume, as a worst case, that all efforts regarding this issue will be unilateral on the part of the U. S.

Based on these assumptions, how will CINCEUR ensure conventional stability in the Mediterranean? According to Secretary of Defense Cheney, "American strength has been a major factor in deterring aggression. We must first, therefore, continue to maintain a compelling conventional and nuclear deterrent posture, made possible in large part by a strong alliance system and global military presence."¹ How can CINCEUR most effectively ensure presence in the Mediterranean?

One very effective method is the development and execution of an effective combined exercise program. CINCEUR does this. There are numerous multinational and bilateral exercises conducted routinely on a cyclic basis with many of the littoral nations in the Mediterranean. However, these exercises normally utilize only those forces deployed in-theater and therefore consist predominantly of the Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force. That notwithstanding, this is a superb method of demonstrating

presence and associated combat power.

The primary method of providing presence is through forward deployment. The Air Force and Army provide a presence where they are stationed and in areas where they exercise and train, but because of the fixed nature of their base structure, they are inherently limited in area with regards to the presence mission. On the other hand, naval forces routinely visit the many ports throughout the Mediterranean (with the exception of most of the Arab nations).

If presence fails to maintain stability, CINCEUR would be forced to revert to crisis response. The type of response is critically dependent on the crisis scenario. At the lowest level of response he could move assigned forces into position. This is a major task for Army units (since none are routinely in the region), a moderate task for Air Force units if it requires staging to another base, and routine operations for naval units. He could also covertly utilize special operations forces, but for the purposes of classification, they will not be addressed here.

If the movement of forces fails to diffuse the situation, then a measured response will be necessary. This considers the capabilities of the different forces, and that will be discussed in detail in the analysis section.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The primary means of achieving regional stability is through deterrence. If deterrence fails, crisis response is necessary to stabilize a situation before it escalates. Both deterrence and crisis response are achieved through the perceptions of our potential opponents regarding our capabilities and intent to utilize our forces. Based on this, how will CINCEUR determine which forces are best suited to achieving his objective of conventional regional stability?

In order to effectively analyze the overall capabilities of the alternatives, we must establish measures of effectiveness (MOE's). The factors that need to be considered when determining force effectiveness are 1) the degree of commitment and resolve, 2) the ability to control escalation, 3) power projection capabilities, 4) availability and 5) sustainability. Based on the previously stated assumptions, availability (sufficiency of forces) and level of sustainability are equivalent and will not be considered. Sustainability will only be discussed in the context of whether or not forces possess any organic sustainment. Therefore, we are left with commitment and resolve, escalation control, capability, and availability (reaction time).

Let us analyze each of CINCEUR's alternative force selections (forward deployed land-based, forward deployed naval and CONUS-based crisis response forces) in order to determine

which one is the force of choice for conventional regional stability.

First let us analyze commitment and resolve. It is obvious that presence demonstrates a significantly higher degree of commitment than contingency force utilization does. "Operating in overseas areas provides us with strategic advantages that cannot be approximated by forces in CONUS, no matter how ready. It allows us to back our word visibly, in a strategic context, immediately."¹ Resolve, however, is a little different. Whether or not CINCEUR would have the resolve to call upon CONUS-based forces would undoubtedly be scenario dependent, but some of the factors to consider would be the seriousness of the situation and the time, effort and cost to mobilize and deploy those forces. If CONUS-based forces were used, that would definitely demonstrate a high degree of resolve. However, that decision would be more difficult make and would be reserved for the most serious scenarios. Naval forces, because of their mobility, do not normally demonstrate the commitment or resolve that land forces do. Considering these factors, forward deployed land-based forces are clearly the force that continually displays the predominance of commitment and resolve.

Next we need to analyze availability in the context of reaction time. This needs to be viewed from the perspective of both air power and ground forces. First, let us look at air power. The Mediterranean is approximately 2000 miles long (east to west). The location of a potential crisis is important in

this analysis. If a situation develops which is within range of forward deployed Air Force unit's bases, they can immediately strike it and sustain those efforts. If, however, it is beyond their range, they may require aerial refueling support or may only be able to conduct strikes periodically.

A CVBG (and to a much lesser degree, an ATF) is initially in a similar situation. If they are not within range of the target area, they can conduct immediate strikes, but cannot sustain them until the force has closed to within range of the target area. Once within range, they can conduct sustained operations for long periods. Additionally, airborne power projection can be supplemented by Tomahawk missile strikes. Normally, these assets are dispersed throughout the Mediterranean. Finally, naval forces possess a limited power projection capability with naval gunfire (which we will consider as an airborne capability here) which may be able to react rapidly because of close proximity to a target area.

CONUS-based Air Force units can project power rapidly, but not immediately, anywhere in the Mediterranean. However, their strikes are not sustainable due to the distances involved with these missions. Therefore, based on the factors considered here, airborne naval forces (including Tomahawk missiles, and, to a lesser degree, naval gunfire) are the most effective forces because they can strike anywhere in CINCEUR's Southern Region and sustain those efforts immediately or shortly thereafter.

As far as ground forces are concerned, both forward deployed

and CONUS-based require lift to fight in the Southern Region. It is difficult to determine which forces can deploy more rapidly since this is very scenario dependent- particularly for the forward deployed forces. However, both of these forces could be more rapid than an ATF, depending on the ATF's location in the Mediterranean. This is a very subjective and scenario dependent consideration, but I would have to give a slight edge to the airlifted forces. Considering both air and land forces, it is a difficult choice to make since it is so situationally dependent. Therefore, I will say that for the MOE of availability, in terms of reaction time, the forces are equivalent.

The next area to analyze is that of capabilities. By this I mean the ability to project power wherever necessary in order to either demonstrate the capability to, or actually defeat, hostile forces. As a part of this capability, it is critical to consider organic sustainment since the ability to sustain operations from the outset may be pivotal in diffusing a situation prior to hostilities or before it can escalate.

As discussed earlier, forward deployed Air Force units can project and sustain air power immediately to anywhere within their combat radius from their base. This radius can be extended through the use of aerial refueling (which may or may not require redeployment of tanker assets). Two factors must be considered here which affect the decision to utilize these assets. The first is that flights with extended ranges may require smaller weapons loads to compensate for the fuel requirements- although

not necessarily. This problem has been significantly reduced by the implementation of high tech weapons. Secondly, and more importantly, the longer an aircrew must fly prior to reaching a target, the less effective they may become as a result of fatigue. This was especially true in the 1986 attack against Libya (El Dorado Canyon)- although that was an extreme example because the Air Force mission was conducted from outside of the Southern Region. That notwithstanding, forward deployed, land-based Air Force units are able to project power throughout a wide range of capabilities anywhere in the Mediterranean.

CVBG's possess unique capabilities. Because of the necessity to defend themselves at sea, CVBG's are made up of all types of aircraft and contain multi-mission capability. Power projection in the Southern Region can be tailored from a small, surgical strike to large and continuous attacks which can be sustained for long periods because of the carrier's ability to close within close proximity of the target area. A critical point of concern to CINCEUR is that all of the potential crisis areas in his Southern Region are well within range of carrier striking forces. The ability of the carrier to "move the airfield" definitely enhances her power projection capabilities.

The ATF with her AV-8B Harrier aircraft possesses a limited power projection capability. The primary mission of these aircraft is to support the ground combat element of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) of the ATF, but they are capable of conducting limited strikes as well. These aircraft carry less

ordnance and have shorter range than carrier and Air Force aircraft, and are limited to day, visual (clear weather) missions, but they can sustain them immediately because of their ability to close the target area.

CONUS-based Air Force units, as previously discussed, can project power anywhere in the Mediterranean, but these initial strikes (by strategic forces) cannot be sustained continuously because of the ranges involved. However, once tactical units can be deployed to the theater, they possess the same capabilities as the forward deployed Air Force units. Although this does take some period of time, we saw this extremely well-executed in Desert Shield. Despite this, the edge in airborne power projection must go to naval forces because of their ability to immediately conduct and sustain any type mission throughout the theater.

Since there are no Army forces routinely deployed in the Southern Region, any Army forces would have to be airlifted in either from the Central Region or CONUS. This presents us with two problems, the first of which is the composition of these forces. Of necessity, they will be light forces with little or no forced entry capability. This is coupled with their extremely limited initial sustainability. There may be situations in which it is desirable to utilize these forces- particularly because of their rapid deployment capability, but it does present some limitations to their employment.

The MAGTF, which is the heart of the ATF, is a small, but

capable fighting force that can be utilized for a wide range of missions. The MAGTF possesses a degree of armor and has an inherent forced entry capability through its amphibious landing capability. It also has a significant organic sustainment. The MAGTF, therefore, is best suited in this theater in most scenarios because of these capabilities.

The final MOE is escalation control. This is a fairly objective consideration. Army forces, because of their commitment and resolve, and the difficulty of withdrawing them (as opposed to the MAGTF) are much less able to control escalation. Air Force units- if not deployed in the country where the crisis is occurring can easily control escalation. However, if they are deployed with Army units (who they would be supporting) then they have a problem similar to the Army.

Naval forces, on the other hand, are perfectly suited to control escalation for the same reason that they do not demonstrate the commitment and resolve that Air Force and Army forces possess- their mobility. As Adm. Larson stated, "... (naval) forces on station just over the horizon in international waters and airspace, ... can be hastened to the scene of any crisis and just as quickly and quietly be withdrawn when the crisis has been resolved."2

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Are naval deployments the key element to conventional regional deterrence? Are they not? Are some other forces better suited to this task? We have reviewed some background information, made some assumptions and then focused our attention on the Mediterranean theater- CINCEUR's Southern Region. What have we learned?

After analyzing the commitment, resolve, reaction time, capabilities, organic sustainment and escalation control of the different forces available to CINCEUR we would probably have to give the edge to naval forces. But many of these evaluations are subjective- at least to some degree, and all are very situationally dependent. Are naval forces really better suited to this mission than the others?

History would certainly lead us to believe so. Since World War II, naval forces have been involved in, either by presence or force, every incident in the Southern Region. One could counter that with the fact that this is logical since the preponderance of forces deployed in the region are naval forces. Isn't it more efficient and effective to send a CVBG or ATF off the coast of Libya (1981 and twice in 1986), Lebanon (1958, 1976 and 1981-84) or Israel (1956, 1967 and 1973) than to deploy other forces to temporary bases requiring logistic development and diplomatic

approval? I submit that it is.

Perhaps the Southern Region was a poor choice for an unbiased analysis. I think not. According to the Brookings Institute study quoted earlier, of the 215 incidents of all degrees involving the demonstrative use of military power which occurred worldwide between 1945 and 1976, 100 (47%) involved naval forces only and 177 (82%) involved naval and other forces.¹ If extended to 1984 by a follow-on study, those figures come out to 125 of 286 (44%) total incidents involved naval forces only and 232 (81%) involved naval and other forces.² Another important point is that,

Outside of the territory of our current alliances (where we maintain military forces at bases in foreign countries) or Warsaw Pact territory, 87 percent of the locations around the world at which the U. S. has established a diplomatic presence are within 300 miles of the sea.³

Also, according to Admiral Trost,

Since most of the world's population lives within 50 miles of the sea, our naval power projection capabilities will remain particularly useful in applying U. S. military might at appropriate places and times. ...most of (our interests) are found in littoral areas.⁴

This means that a very high percentage of the area in which U. S. interests are involved are within the reach of our naval forces.

Not only have naval forces historically been the preferred choice to maintain stability, but they are, as I have shown, more effective and efficient in this mission. Therefore, it is my strong opinion that naval deployments are, in fact, the key element to conventional regional deterrence.

However, as the only true superpower remaining, we must ensure that we not only utilize naval deployments in this role, but that we also continue to provide our unified commanders with a variety of capabilities with which to ensure deterrence and stability in their areas of responsibility- because each service possesses unique capabilities which enhance those of the others.

NOTES

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